

THE PLACE OF ANIMAL PROTECTION WITHIN THE EU SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

A PAPER BY EUROGROUP FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

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The EU is currently reviewing its sustainable development strategy (SDS), which was set up in 2001. Sustainable development can be defined as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The relation with animals

Many human activities involving or impacting upon animals are unsustainable in that they either jeopardise the survival of species, pose serious threats to human or animal health or the environment or are recklessly wasteful of, or damaging to, animals. They include for example the use of thousands of animals in chemical testing and genetic manipulation, the use of selective breeding for increased productivity of farm animals leading to health problems and the massive import of wild animals for the pet trade, threatening species conservation in the countries of origin and EU native fauna when they become invasive species. Eurogroup for Animal Welfare believes that, where animal protection issues have a significant sustainability dimension, they should be integrated into the EU SDS.

Indeed, in certain key areas covered by the SDS - agriculture, transport and research - the EU is obliged by a Treaty of Amsterdam Protocol to pay “full regard to the welfare requirements of animals”. When it enters into force, the Constitutional Treaty will add fisheries to the areas covered by this requirement.

This paper sets out the serious animal protection considerations - all related to unsustainable practices - that arise in three of the priority areas adopted by the Göteborg Council as the focus of the SDS: public health, management of natural resources and climate change.

PUBLIC HEALTH

The objectives of the SDS concerning public health include: improving food safety and quality, tackling resistance to antibiotics and ensuring the safety of chemicals.

Food safety and animal health risks posed by highly intensive¹ animal farming

Highly intensive livestock production often imposes serious health problems and pain on animals as well as frustrating their ability to perform natural behaviours, leading to stress and other forms of mental suffering. Animal health is part of animal welfare: when an

¹ In this context, we consider as highly intensive production systems where animals are kept in close confinement, the density is too high to allow them to express their natural behaviour (sometimes they cannot turn around) and the environment is characterised by poor or no enrichment. We recognize that so-called extensive systems which allow too many animals per area unit, fail to allow for proper husbandry care, and/or don't provide shelter against adverse climatic conditions, also lead to poor animal welfare and damage to the environment.

animal's health is poor, so is its welfare. Moreover, Kirkden & Broom (2004)² in a literature review concluded that there are also several routes by which poor welfare leads to poor health, and that the welfare of animals is relevant to the assessment of their health. They particularly showed how the environmental challenges to which cattle and sheep are submitted during transport are responsible for welfare problems such as exhaustion, dehydration and injury, which can lead to an increase of the incidence of pneumonia.

Highly intensive livestock farming also poses serious threats to food safety. The overcrowded, often unsanitary conditions of production facilitate the rapid transmission of infectious diseases within the farm unit, some of which are zoonotic (can infect humans). In addition, the selective breeding of animals for high production levels can lead to weakened immunity, making the animals more susceptible to infection (Kirkden and Broom, 2004).

Millions of farm animals are transported annually on long journeys. These journeys risk spreading zoonotic pathogens such as *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* and infectious animal diseases such as foot-and-mouth and classical swine fever over long distances. A 2004 report by the EFSA Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare concluded that transportation “can spread both animal and zoonotic diseases sometimes over large distances”. The SCAHAW report published in 2002³ previously stated that the stressors experienced by animals during transport can enhance the level and duration of pathogen shedding by animals sub-clinically affected with disease, thereby increasing their infectivity as well.

The link between poor animal health and risks to human health has been recognised by the Opinion on Food-Borne Zoonoses of the Scientific Committee on Veterinary Measures relating to Public Health (12 April 2000).

Antibiotic resistance

Many pathogens responsible for serious human disease have developed resistance to certain antibiotics. This is partly due to irresponsible use of antibiotics in human medicine, but also owing to their excessive use in highly intensive animal farming. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be transmitted from animals to humans, mainly through the food chain⁴.

Antibiotics are routinely used in intensive farming both as growth promoters in animal feed and as prophylactics when they are given to whole herds/flocks to prevent the diseases which are inevitable when large numbers of animals are kept in overcrowded, often unhygienic, conditions. Antibiotics are in effect being used as a substitute for good husbandry and hygiene.

An EU prohibition on all antibiotics used as feed additives is due to come into force on 1st January 2006. In practice this may not lead to any reduction in the volume of antibiotics

² Kirkden & Broom, 2004. Links between animal health, in the terms of the World Trade Organisation, and animal welfare. Report commissioned by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

³ “The Welfare of Animals during Transport (details for horses, pigs, sheep and cattle)”, Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare, 2002

⁴ David Taylor (2003). Antimicrobial Resistance and Community Based Animal Health. In: Community Animal Health Workers – Threat or opportunity? The IDL Group eds. Crewkerne 2003 pp.56-64.

used in farming. This is because growth-promoting antibiotics also help prevent disease. The prohibition of their use as feed-additive might well trigger an increase in their use as a prophylactic to treat whole herds/flocks when only one or two animals are actually infected. In addition, there may be an increase in therapeutic use of medicines to treat animals in systems where the consequences of poor practices were previously masked through use of prophylactic drugs. If the EU is to halt the decline in the efficacy of antibiotics in human medicine, it must phase out their routine prophylactic use in farming in conjunction with a programme to enhance the health status of animals by improving the conditions in which they are kept. (There is, of course, no objection to the therapeutic use of antibiotics to treat individual sick animals.)

Animal experimentation

Ending the use of animals in experiments that cause them pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm should be a priority objective of sustainable development, not only for ethical reasons, but also for scientific reasons. The use of animals as 'models' of human disease, and human susceptibility to toxic chemicals, is highly unsatisfactory in view of the differences in biology and biochemistry between species.

A range of non-animal techniques has been developed including cell culture, computer and mathematical models, and non-invasive human brain imaging. Such alternatives have the potential to offer better quality information for health and environmental protection and for understanding disease processes. They also have the competitive advantage of often being cheaper and quicker to use. More effort is needed to develop and use these approaches as replacements for animal tests.

The future of safety testing and medical research lies in the use of modern, sophisticated, non-animal techniques which are capable of revolutionising this field. By committing increased resources to the development, validation and use of alternatives, the EU could become the world leader in this area, leading to significant economic benefits including high-skilled job creation.

MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The objectives of the SDS in this area include the protection of habitats and halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 as well as ensuring sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems.

Wildlife trade

The EU is one of the largest importers of wild animals and products. Between 1996-2002 the EU and the new Member States imported the following protected (CITES-listed) animals and products: 6 million birds (86% of global live bird imports), 1.6 million live reptiles (17% of global imports) 10 million reptile skins (35%) and 57,000 live mammals (25%). The imported birds include 1.6 million parrots. Imported reptiles include lizards (e.g. iguanas), snakes, tortoises and crocodiles. Alongside the above legal trade, a large illegal trade thrives; the global illegal trade is estimated to be second in value only to the drug trade.

This trade, particularly the illegal segment, poses a serious threat to the survival of many animal species in the wild. As a major wildlife consumer, the EU has a particular

responsibility to ensure that the trade does not endanger species and to eliminate the illegal trade.

The trade is fuelled by the growing demand for exotic pets in the EU. Eurogroup believes that the import of wild-caught animals, and in particular wild birds, for the pet trade should be prohibited. This trade imperils the survival of species and can bring lethal diseases such as avian influenza and exotic Newcastle disease into the EU, jeopardising the EU poultry industry.

The objectives of the existing EU legislation on zoos are to protect wild fauna and to conserve biodiversity by providing for the licensing and inspection of zoos and by strengthening the role of zoos in the conservation of biodiversity. However there is considerable concern that more than half the establishments qualifying as zoos in the EU do not fulfil these objectives in an acceptable way in animal welfare terms. Under EU law zoos are required to accommodate the animals under conditions that satisfy the biological and conservation requirements of the individual species, *inter alia* by providing species specific enrichment of the enclosure and maintaining a high standard of animal husbandry. Establishments which do not respect these conditions and do not participate in conservation activities should be closed. Furthermore some species, whose needs are so specific that they are very difficult to satisfy in captivity, such as elephants⁵ and dolphins⁶, should preferably not be kept in zoos.

Threats to EU wildlife and habitats

The Commission acknowledges that, due to pressure from activities such as intensive farming, many natural habitats have been destroyed. The Commission stresses that the EU's biodiversity is under threat: 42% of our native mammals, 38% of birds, 30% of amphibians, 45% of reptiles and 52% of freshwater fish are threatened. Loss of biodiversity also has adverse economic effects as it provides raw materials and is the basis for our food, agriculture and fisheries.

Stronger action is needed to halt biodiversity decline. In particular the EU should: (a) ensure that sustainability objectives are fully integrated into other sectors such as agriculture and fisheries, (b) secure improved implementation by the Member States of the Habitats and Birds Directives, and (c) take steps to ensure effective management of Natura 2000 sites.

Environmental damage resulting from highly intensive farming

The impacts of pesticides use in intensive arable farming and horticulture on the environment are well known. It should be added that their standard, legal use in normal agricultural practice also causes substantial harm to local wild animals⁷.

Highly intensive livestock production is also putting an unsustainable pressure on water, land and the atmosphere, in addition to farm animal welfare concerns. In reasonable

⁵ Clubb R. and Mason G. 2002. A review of the Welfare of Zoo Elephants in Europe. University of Oxford

⁶ Klinowska M. and Brown S. 1986. A Review of Dolphinaria prepared for the Department of the Environment (UK)

⁷ "Effects of pesticides on Wild Terrestrial Mammals in Britain" Literature review by David MacDonald for the RSPCA, 2002

amounts manure can enrich soil; however, the excess nutrients in the large volumes of manure and liquid slurry produced on intensive farms are a major pollutant. Pigs and poultry excrete about 2/3 of the nitrogen and phosphate in their feed. These pollute rivers, lakes and groundwater, contaminating sources of drinking water and damaging aquatic and wetland ecosystems. As will be seen in the section on climate change, animal farming is also responsible for the emission of damaging greenhouse gases.

It should also be noted that some “free range” farming systems, often thought of as “extensive”, may in fact significantly degrade both the environment and animal welfare, and should be considered unsustainable. Examples include upland sheep, cattle, and goats, where over-stocking causes significant damage to wildlife habitats, and poor access prevents proper husbandry and care.

A clear commitment by the EU to move towards environmentally-friendly animal husbandry would both end the poor welfare that is inherent in highly intensive production and deliver a sustainable agriculture that threatened neither the environment nor habitats and biodiversity.

Marine environment

A wide range of activities threatens marine species and ecosystems including pollution from chemicals and oil. An integrated approach to the protection of the marine environment is urgently needed. Two major animal welfare problems related to unsustainable practices are:

Dolphin and porpoise by-catch

The main threat to the conservation status of dolphins and porpoises arises from fisheries by-catch. Each year thousands of these small cetaceans are accidentally entangled and drowned in fishing nets. A 2004 Regulation introduced some largely inadequate measures. It requires a proportion of vessels to carry observers to monitor by-catch and pingers (acoustic deterrents attached to the nets) to be used in certain fisheries. Disappointingly, smaller vessels are exempt from these requirements. Moreover, though useful, pingers are of limited effectiveness. Strengthening of this Regulation is essential. Significant changes to fishing gear and methods are urgently needed to halt the decline of dolphins and porpoises.

Need to protect whales from military sonars

High-intensity sonar systems – used to track submarines – are linked with fatal mass strandings of whales. These sonars can also lead to deafness and damage to internal organs. The European Parliament has voted for moratoriums and restrictions on the use of high-intensity, active, naval sonars.

Aquaculture

Welfare problems can occur in intensively managed fish farming systems, including problems of handling, transport, water quality and slaughter. They can also occur in less intensively managed systems, for example if salmon are given too much space they can develop territorial behaviours with resulting bouts of aggression. Despite this, the EU has not laid down any specific welfare standards to protect them. Atlantic salmon and rainbow trout are the main fish species farmed in Europe, although increasing interest is being shown in other species such as cod and halibut.

Fish faeces and uneaten feed falls to the seabed, polluting the aquatic environment. This sediment can kill marine life and lead to damaging algal blooms, although with good management the effects can be limited to a small area in the immediate vicinity of the cages⁸. We also understand that recent (unpublished) studies of cod farming in Scotland may suggest that the benthos beneath some sites may actually improve after the first season of farming.

Fish farming may also be detrimental to wild fish when they breed with escaped farmed stock, the hybrid offspring losing part of the genetic adaptation of wild fish and having lower survival rates, although the long-term effects on wild population trends are not entirely clear. In addition, sea lice may be transferred from farmed salmon to wild salmon and trout, leading to increased mortality rates. The link between farmed salmon and local declines in wild fish populations is now recognised in Scotland, where because of a variety of factors including unsustainable wild harvest and habitat degradation, populations are at near crisis level.

If it is to be a viable and sustainable alternative to depleted wild fish stocks, aquaculture must be conducted in an environmentally and animal welfare friendly way.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The objectives of the SDS as regards climate change include the attainment of a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change is likely to endanger the survival of many land and marine species due to its probable adverse impact on habitats and feed supplies. Intensive livestock production contributes to global warming and acidification through the emission of ammonia from animal excreta, methane (mainly from cattle), nitrous oxide from fertilisers and slurry and carbon dioxide.

⁸ AMEC Earth & environmental Ltd 2002. Aquaculture Information Review. Canadian Technical Report of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 2434

Eurogroup proposals to integrate animal welfare into sustainable development

Policy mechanisms to encourage sustainable farming

A move towards more sustainable, extensive and animal-welfare friendly husbandry would create rural jobs and help reduce intensive farming's detrimental impact on the environment and health. Such a move could be encouraged by:

- Market-based instruments designed to internalise external costs such as a tax on excess manure production.
- A further transfer of CAP funds into rural development, with a requirement that measures to encourage extensive animal farming and high animal welfare standards are included in all Member States' rural development plans.
- Promoting changes in consumption and production patterns that support a move away from intensive livestock farming.
- Public food procurement policies – by governments, schools, hospitals, armed forces and prisons - that support delivery of sustainable and humane farming.
- Private procurement: the adoption by supermarkets, food manufacturers and chain restaurants of a policy – under their Corporate Social Responsibility Strategies - of only sourcing meat, milk and eggs that have been produced sustainably and humanely.

International dimension

Trade liberalisation is putting pressure on EU animal protection standards. It is vital that the outcome of the WTO negotiations enhances the EU's ability to maintain and improve animal welfare and does not encourage further worldwide industrialisation of farming through a 'race to the bottom'.

Many of the threats to animals' well-being and survival are present worldwide. The EU and the Member States must work with their international partners in fora such as CITES and the International Whaling Commission to find global solutions to these dangers.

The EU should promote sustainable animal farming in developing countries and discourage the spread of industrial livestock production which out-competes small farmers thereby undermining rural livelihoods, compromising food security and safety and degrading the environment. The EU already offers trade-related assistance to help developing countries enter export markets. That assistance should now be extended to produce from sustainable and humane livestock farms in developing countries so that they are genuinely able to access markets in the North.

Conclusion

Eurogroup urges the Council and the Commission to update the objectives of the EU SDS in order to address the above animal protection concerns– all of which have an adverse impact on sustainability - and to identify and implement measures to tackle the problems outlined in this paper.